

MEDIA BIAS Are U.S. news media biased? Did they minimize or hide the scandals of the Roosevelt, Kennedy, and Johnson Administrations? Did they maximize and expose the scandals of the Nixon Administration beyond their true value?

In his new and provocative book, "It Didn't Start With Watergate," Victor Lasky answers all three questions with a yes. Lasky then proceeds to detail some of the scandals of the American political past and the biased treatment accorded them by media persons.

He writes about the wiretapping of Martin Luther King Jr., which was ordered by Attorney General Robert Kennedy. "What is astonishing ... is that media executives had known for years that Dr. King was the object of illegal surveillance. They knew it when Dr. King was alive. And they knew it because FBI agents had come to them peddling gossip about King's sex life which could only have arisen from surreptitious recordings."

Lasky pinpoints as "the best-kept secret of the Kennedy Administration ... the President's predilection for pretty girls." He is outraged by "the way Kennedy managed to carry on without a single breath of scandal reaching the public prints. It wasn't," he insists, "because the boys with the ballpoint pens weren't aware of what was going on. Many of them were. The media that wept copious tears about how Nixon degraded his office could never work up any moral indignation about the 'moral stain' brought to the White House by one of its heroes."

Lasky also rakes Lyndon Johnson over the coals, pointing out that when

Johnson "first went to Congress in the Thirties, he was a poor boy, dirt-poor. But after a lifetime in Washington, Johnson died leaving a fortune estimated at between \$14 and \$20 million. In other words, the Johnsons have been among the wealthiest families ever to occupy the White House. How Johnson managed to amass such great wealth without ever leaving government service still raises questions ... but for the most part the media ignored the story...."

Lasky, a veteran Nixon-defender who describes Watergate as a "media event," is admittedly biased, but the title of his book is apt: "It Didn't Start With Watergate."